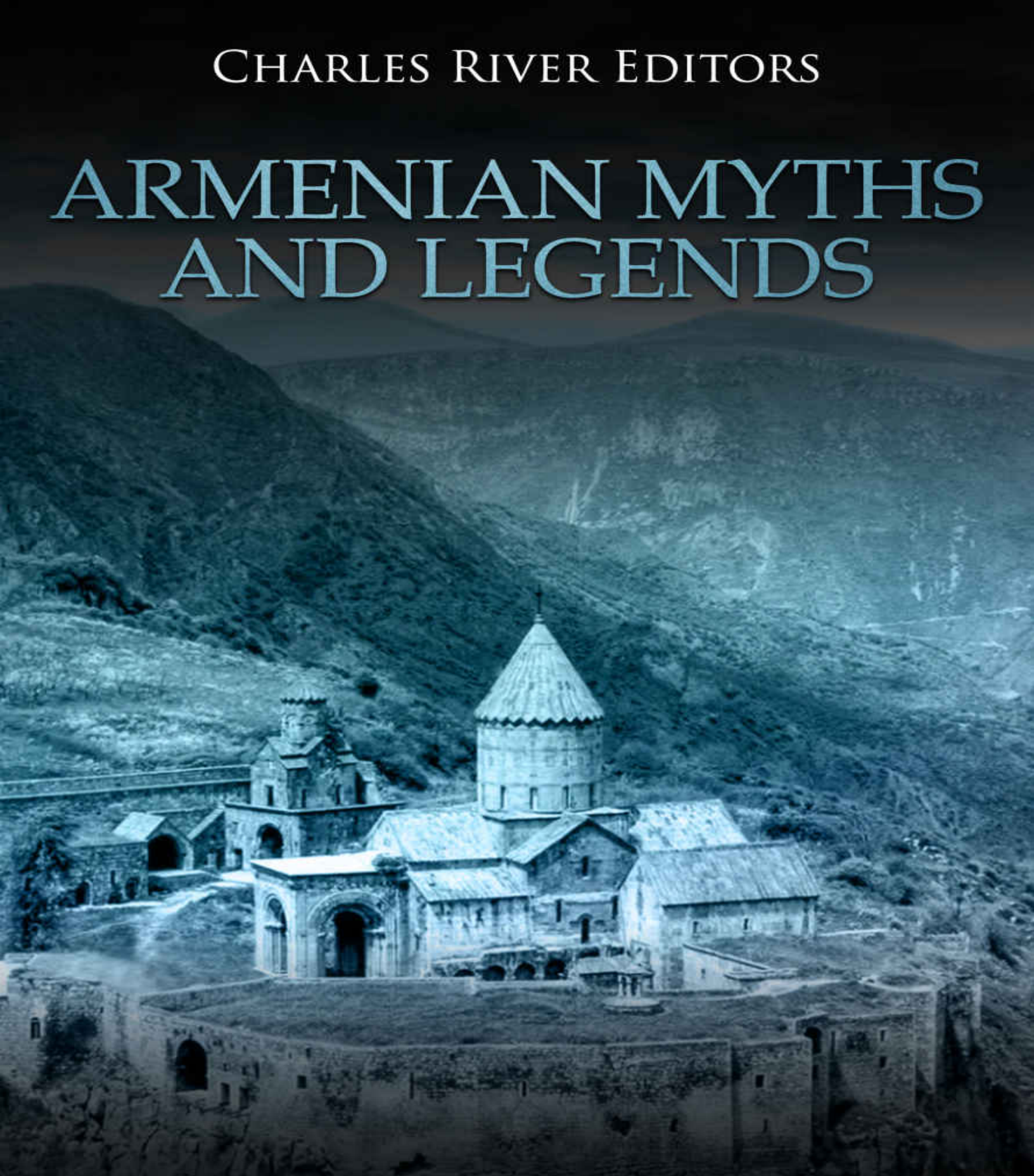
Charles River Editors

ARMENIAN MYTHS AND LEGENDS



The History of the Mythology and Folk Tales from Armenia

Armenian Myths and Legends: The History of the Mythology and Folk Tales from Armenia

By Charles River Editors

The Garni Temple in Armenia

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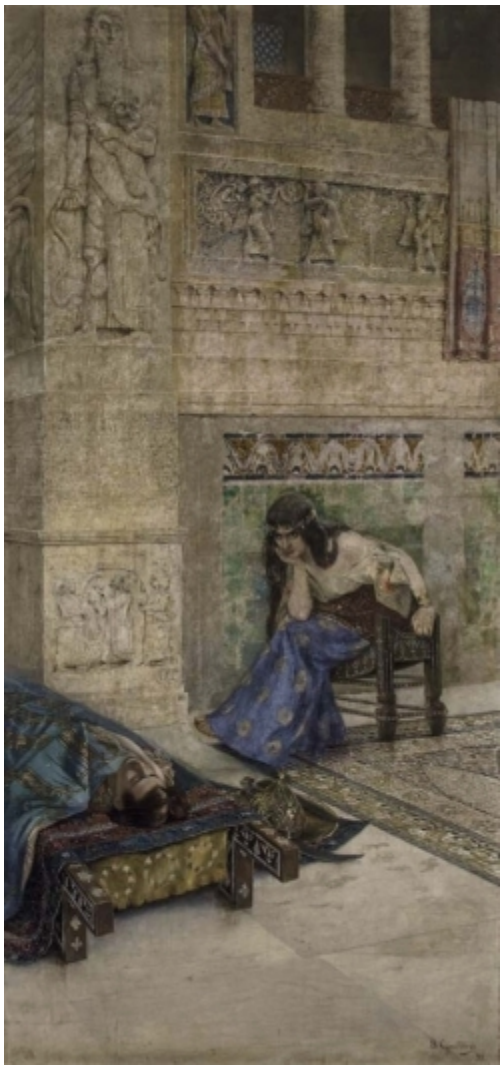
Introduction



“Shamiram stares at the corpse of Ara the Beautiful” by Vardges Sureniants (1899)

Armenian Myths and Legends

Armenia is considered to be one of the oldest cradles of civilization, with the area of historical Armenia roughly extending to the area stretching from the Euphrates River in the west, the region of Artsakh, parts of Caucasian Albania to the east, parts of the modern state of Georgia to the north, and its southern boundary abutting the northern tip of

Mesopotamia. Armenia is a landlocked mountainous plateau which rises to an average of over 6,000 above sea level, and for this reason, the territory was commonly referred to as the Armenian Highlands. In these highlands, Armenian culture, as well as its language, started to develop.

A rich cultural material, mythological and legendary tales, toponyms and names, as well as historical sources, serve as evidence that the Armenian Highlands have been inhabited by Armenians since the dawn of time. Like many other people all over the world, Armenian people also created their own mythology and heroes. The first pantheon of the Armenian pagan gods had gone through its formation parallel to the development of the Armenian people, as a consequence of the religious beliefs that the people bore.

Before being the first kingdom to convert to and accept Christianity as its religion in the year of 301 AD, Armenians were pagan and believed in a multitude of gods and goddesses. These were attributed with many natural elements. The main sources that have conveyed the Armenian pagan myths and legends to the following generations are the Armenian historians of the 4-7th centuries, such as Agathangelos, Faustus the Byzantine, Movses Khorenatsi and Sebeos. Another prime source containing many clues which helps us grasp and comprehend these myths and legends is the Armenian national heroic epic *Daredevils of Sassoun*.

Armenian Myths and Legends: The History of the Mythology and Folk Tales from Armenia looks at the stories that came from Armenia in ancient times, including their influences from other cultures. Along with pictures depicting important people, places, and events, you will learn about Armenian mythology like never before.

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What's in a Name?

In the *History of Armenia,* by Movses Khorenatsi, readers learn about the topographic evidence of "the land of the gods and the immortals" in the Armenian Highlands. By quoting the Assyrian historian Mar Abbas Katina, Khorenatsi goes on to write that after the failed construction attempt of the Babel Tower, Hayk, son of Torgom and a descendant to Noah's youngest son Japheth, refused to obey Titanid Bel of Babylon. After the birth of his son Aramaneak, Hayk left Babylon and headed to the land of Ararad, south of lake Van. In his elderly years, Hayk handed the lands over to his grandson Kadmos, and together with the rest of his followers, he travelled in a northwesterly direction and settled in a valley called Hark.

Ararad/Ararat (Արարադ/Արարատ) is the oldest toponym of Armenian nature to ever be mentioned in Armenian historiography. According to many linguists, the particles *arar* and *ad* suggest that this toponym has connections with cosmogony and the creation of men. In the Armenian language the particle *arar* comes from the word *ararel* (արարել) which means to create. *Ad* in turn is a suffix which is being used in toponyms.

In the historiographical work by the prominent Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi, the other oldest toponym to be used while referring to Armenia is Hark (Հարք). The explanation Khorenatsi gives to this name is the following - The Land of Fathers (Հայրերի երկիր). Academic consensus among historians is that this toponym suggests the residence of the head god of the Armenian pantheon used to be here — making Hark the place where the head god created men. This explanation of the origins of the toponym Hark is further explained in other Armenian manuscripts.

According to a popular standpoint, the god Haya (Հայա) — who is present in Sumerian, Akkadian and Kura-Araxes Armenian beliefs — ruled over the *Mayr Erkir* (Մայր Երկիր), The Mother Country, where men were created. This country was considered to have lain in the

headwaters of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and therefore in the Armenian Highlands.

Historical Armenia, a considerable part of which is currently a part of Eastern Turkey, while the rest of it forms the Republic of Armenia, is often referred to as Kingdom of Greater Armenia or simply as Greater Armenia (Մեծ Հայք). It was divided into fifteen provinces, the first of which was called Upper Hayk (Բարձր Հայք). This province was actually one of the highest geographical points in the Armenian Highlands. In this up-high lands were situated the temples and *mehyan*s (մեհյան) dedicated to the Armenian pagan gods and goddesses such as Aramazd, Anahit, Mihr, Nanė and others. One of the most important and notable places of worship in historical Armenia can be found at the summit of Mount Nemrut, which is located in southeastern regions of modern Turkey. There, monumental statues of the Armenian gods and allegedly a royal tomb have been found.

Nonetheless, according to Armenian historians, such as Agathangelos and Khorenatsi, the Armenian pagan gods and goddesses used to reside in other parts of the Armenian Highlands as well. As a result, the places of worship were spread throughout the provinces of the Kingdom of Greater Armenia. This might be what caused many Armenian toponyms to reflect the names of the gods or goddesses who were being worshipped in the area, such as Aragats (Արագած) - the throne of Ara, Mehogats (Մեհոգած) - the Throne of Mihr, etc.

One of the questions which interests many historians is the origins for the words *armen* (արմեն) and *hay* (հայ). While *armen* is used by foreign people when referring to Armenia, Armenians call themselves *hay*. The reasons for this division can be found in the historiographical compositions of the above-mentioned Armenian historians.

As already mentioned above, Hayk the Great, who after leaving Babylon had settled down in the Land of Hark, fought a battle against the Titanid Bel near the shores of the lake Van. According to Khorenatsi, Hayk arose as the victor in this battle, “... and the Land of Armenians was called Hayq, after the most courageous and most remarkable of all giants, our patriarch Hayk...”

Khorenatsi also writes about Aram, the great-grandson of Hayk, who expanded the territories of Hayq by leading many victorious battles. There is a standpoint that the name *Armenia* (Արմենիա), otherwise referred to as *Armenik* (Արմենիկ) originates from that of Aram's[1].

The term *Armina* (Armenia) was present in one of the most important historical sources of the ancient world, in the multilingual (Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian) Behistun Inscription authored by the fourth king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, Darius I the Great. The Behistun Inscription is located on a cliff at Mount Behistun near the city of Kermanshah in western Iran. The inscription is mostly about the rebellions, which took place in the Achaemenid Empire, and how Darius suppressed them. One of the countries listed in the inscription that rebelled against Darius, was Armenia. The Old Persian part of the inscription uses the term *Armina*, while the Elamite version uses the term *Harminuea*, and the Babylonian section refers to the country as *Urartu/Urashtu*. The inscription contains detailed descriptions of the rebellion which took place in Armenia. The fact that Darius uses the term Urartu while referring to Armenia is very interesting.

Greek historians have also contemplated the origins of the name Armenia. Several Greek sources, most notably Strabo, a famous geographer, philosopher, and historian who lived in Asia Minor, claimed that Armenus of the city Armenion, situated in the region of Thessaly, was present when Jason and his Argonauts sailed to the land of Colchis. The historian went on to write that during the voyage, Armenus separated from the rest of the Argonauts and stayed behind in the Armenian Highlands. Consequently, he named the land and the people after himself.

Another standpoint, also based on the legend of Armenus the Thessalian, exists as well. References to it can be found in the works of the 5th century BCE historian Herodotus. This standpoint in turn attributes the origin of the name Armenia to Thrace, a historical area in southeast Europe.

Nevertheless, the viewpoint of Movses Khorenatsi on the origins of the pronouns Armenia and Hay is much more widely accepted in scientific circles.

Gods and Goddesses

When it comes to the beliefs and mythologies of ancient civilizations, historians have found that they overlap in many ways, and it's possible to trace some of the connections between cultures. Given its location, there's no question that all sorts of ancient influences would help shape the beliefs of the people who inhabited the Armenian Highlands. For several millennia, the inhabitants of the Armenian Highlands, the *hay-armen*s, worshipped their indigenous gods and goddesses, and created and wrote down folkloric tales about them.

By using the comparative method of analytical studies, researchers can pinpoint similarities amid the demigod and patriarch of the Armenian people Hayk the Great, the Assyrian/Babylonian god Bel Marduk (Greek; *Belos*, Latin; Belus), the Greek hero Orion, and the Scandinavian god Odin, as well as many others. Another good example would be the pagan tale of Hayk the Great and his archenemy Bel, which is quite similar to that of King David and Goliath in the Bible. Another instance is the semblance of the Armenian goddess Anahit to the Greek goddess of love Aphrodite, and the ancient Sumerian goddess of love and beauty Inanna. Finally, the god of fire and war Vahagn Vishapakagh (Vahagn the Dragon Reaper) bears similarities to the Zoroastrian god of victory Verethragna, the Hindu god of thunder and lightning Indra, and the Greek demigod Hercules[2].

Aramazd

The supreme god of the ancient Armenians was Aramazd, the creator of heaven and earth and father to all gods. He is often referred to as "the Great and Brave Aramazd." Unlike the ancient Greeks, who ascribed many children to their supreme gods, only three children of Aramazd's are known to researchers of Armenian history and mythology: a son, Mihr, and two daughters, Anahit and Nanė. The rest of the Armenian gods have no mention of parentage, which has led to the popular opinion that they also are the children of Aramazd.

Information about Aramazd, which has reached modern readers through the works of Movses Khorenatsi and Agathangelos, is scarce and limited

to him being the head of the pantheon of the pagan Armenian gods.

Anahit

An Armenian stamp depicting Anahit

Anahit, who is mentioned in historical sources as the daughter or the wife of Aramazd, was the most beloved and deeply revered goddess of the Armenian pantheon. She was the head goddess of the Armenian pantheon and the goddess of maternity, so she was customarily depicted with a child on her lap. Sometimes she was depicted as wearing a special headdress which extended down her shoulders, worn by Armenian women, especially mothers. People referred to her as The High Lady Anahit (Մեծ Տիկին Անահիտ). Anahit was also the goddess of reason and decency, and the benefactress and protectress of the people.

The people believed that Anahit had been and would be protecting the Armenian land for eternity. It was said that the Armenian kings would plead to her for success, luck, and health before engaging in any activity.

As the deity of maternity, Anahit was also considered to be the goddess of fertility and harvest. She, together with the gods Aramazd and Vahagn, formed the holy trinity of the Armenian pagan pantheon.

The worship of Anahit was widespread throughout Greater Armenia, and temples dedicated to her could be found in all of the 15 provinces. The most common offerings to the temples of Anahit were heifers who bore a white mark on their foreheads. According to the histories and chronologies, such as Khorenatsi's *History of Armenia*, the heifers could be seen grazing all around her temples.

The most famous of Anahit's temples was located in the town of Yeriza (Երիզա). Customarily, many rich and influential people sent their daughters to serve in this temple before they were allowed to wed. The temple had also been famous for its golden statue of Anahit, but unfortunately, the prodigious statue was split into many pieces and sold. This occurred when the soldiers of the Roman general Marcus Antonius invaded the town of Yeriza in 34 BCE. Presently, the bronze head of Anahit's statue can be found in the British Museum under the name the Satala Aphrodite.

Carole Raddato’s picture of Satala Aphrodite

Vahagn

The third most important god of the Armenian pantheon was Vahagn Vishapakagh, who was depicted as a fiery and blond young man. His blond hair and beard were of fire, and his eyes were like suns. The historians wrote that he was born through fire as the heaven, earth, and sea went into labor.

The famous poem which Movses Khorenatsi recorded in his *History of Armenia* is one of the most beloved in modern Armenia: “Heaven was in travail, earth was in travail, the purple sea was also in travail; in the sea travail also gripped the red reed. From the tube of the reed came forth smoke, from the tube of the reed came forth flame. From the flame a red-headed young boy ran out. He had fire for hair, and had flame for beard, and his eyes were suns.”[3]

As soon as he was born, Vahagn started combating the almighty demons and defeated all of them. By doing so, he freed the universe of their evil and of their threats of destruction.

A statue of Vahagn slaying a dragon

During an especially cold winter, Vahagn stole straw from the Assyrian god Barshamin to help his people, and on his way back to Armenia some of the straw fell from Vahagn's carriage and formed the Milky Way. The commonly accepted name of the Milky Way in Armenian is Hardagoghi Chanaparh (Հարդագողի ճանապարհ), which means The Pathway of the Hay-Thief. This is often compared to Greek myths and legends, which asserted the Milky Way came about when Hercules was suckling at Hera's breast while she was sleeping. Hera then woke up and tore him away, and as a result, her milk splattered all over the heavens, thus forming the Milky Way.

Vahagn was the god of courage, war, lightning and thunder, so it’s no surprise Armenian kings would pray and make sacrifices to him before heading to battles.

Astghik

Astghik, the goddess of love and water in the Armenian pantheon, was the lover of Vahagn Vishapakagh. Her worship was connected with the planet Arusyak (Venus). One of her temples, which was located in Ashtishat (Աշտիշատ), was called “the chamber of Vahagn,” and according to the legends, this is where the two lovers would meet. The union of Vahagn and Astghik was a sacred one. It was thanks to this union that rain fell, that earth flourished and that people could have a harvest.

Astghik was commonly portrayed as a naked beauty, usually bathing. Every night she would bathe in the Euphrates River, and the young men of the country, who pined for her love, would make campfires around the river at the slopes of Mount Daghonats (Դաղոնաց) in hopes of gazing at her eternal beauty while she bathed. The sly goddess would cover the surroundings with mist so that no foreign eyes could watch her.

Temples dedicated to Astghik were common in many provinces of Greater Armenia, and some of the most common offerings to the goddess were roses and doves. From the tradition of gifting roses to Astghik, she is also often referred to as Rose-fingered (Վարդամատն).

The festivities dedicated to Astghik would take place during the midsummer season. They bore the name of Vardavar (Վարդավառ), meaning rising roses. People would gift roses to Astghik, release doves and douse each other with water. The festival is still one of the most beloved in modern Armenia. Even after the conversion to Christianity, the love and connection of the people to Astghik was hard to suppress, and thus the festival was connected with the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. To this day, people throughout all of Armenia drench each other, family members and even passing strangers in water.

Nanė

Next in the line of the admired and beloved goddesses of the Armenian pantheon was Nanė. She was said to be the daughter of the head god Aramazd, and she was the goddess of war. Her worship was closely connected with that of Anahit. It is not a coincidence that the main temple to Nanė was located in Yekeghyats district, near one of Anahit's temples.

Even in modern Armenia a grandmother is often referred to as *nanė* (նաներ). This serves as evidence of the connection between the goddesses, as well as of Nanė's widespread worship throughout all of the historical Armenia. Historians believe that, throughout time, the functions of the gods and goddesses changed, and the title of the mother goddess was passed on from Anahit to Nanė.

Mihr

Mihr, Aramazd's son and brother to Anahit and Nanė, was the god of the heavenly light and sun. His main temple was in the town of Bagaharich, in the county of Derjan of the Upper Armenia province of Greater Armenia. The Temple of Garni, the only standing Greco-Roman colonnaded building in modern Armenia, was also dedicated to the god Mihr.

The rear of the Temple of Garni

The worship of Mihr was quite widespread throughout all of Greater Armenia, and the eighth day of each month in the ancient Armenian calendar was named Mihr after him. So was the seventh month of the same calendar, Mehekan, which now coincides with February. Furthermore, the unified Armenian word for their pagan sanctuaries, mehyan (մեհյան), was derived from Mihr's name.

Mihr's name, though with a small transformation, has also found its place in the Armenian national heroic epic *Daredevils of Sassoun*. The second and the fourth parts are called *Big Mher* and *Little Mher,* respectively.

Big Mher was famous for fighting a lion with his bare hands and winning, hence his nickname, Aryutsadzev (Առյուծաձև), which in literal translation would be The Lion Ripper. After gaining fame in his hometown of Sassoun, Mher then goes on killing dragons and saving princesses.

Little Mher is also famous for his heroic deeds. He was the grandson of Big Mher and the last in the line of succession for the throne of Sassoun. Little Mher fights against devils and dragons, as well as the enemies of his homeland. Eventually, tired of the unforgiving and cruel world around him, along with his one and only life, Mher shuts himself in a rock called Agravakar (Ագռավաքար), meaning the Raven Rock. According to the legends, Mher will leave his haven only when the old world crumbles and rises anew, when the injustices of the world disappear, when barley turns the size of a hazelnut and wheat turns the size of rosebud. It is because of this story that Agravakar is commonly known as Mheri Dur (Մհերի դուռ), that is The Door of Mher.

Tir

Tir was the god of knowledge, education, and scholarship. He was also the scribe for Aramazd, the supreme god of the pagan Armenians. His main temple was located near the old Artishat and was commonly called the Divan of Aramazd's Scribe (Արամազդի գրչի դիվան) or the Mehyan of Knowledge (գիտությունների ու ուսուցման

մեհյան). The priests of pagan Armenia would do most of their studying and research here, and the primary focus of their studies was fortune-telling through the reading of dreams, known as yerazahanutyun (երազահանություն). According to the legends, the priests would learn fortune-telling from Tir himself. This is also one of the reasons why Tir's temples were often referred to as Yerazamoyn teghik (Երազամոյն տեղիք), meaning a place filled with dreams. The priests would prophesy to the pilgrims who visited the temples in the name of the god Tir.

Amanor & Vanatur

Amanor & Vanatur were some of the most beloved and celebrated gods of the Armenian pantheon. In ancient Armenian, amanor (Ամանոր) means New Year. Thus, Amanor was the Armenian god of the New Year. He was worshipped during the Armenian New Year, Navasard (Նավասարդ). In the old Armenian calendar, the New Year was what is now the end of July and the beginning of August. This season was considered to be the beginning of the New Year since it was the time for harvest.

Navasard was celebrated all over the country, with great festivities taking place for several days. The celebrations took on an especially large scale in the province of Bagrevand, which was the center of worship in ancient Armenia.

While Amanor was the god of the New Year, Vanatur (Վանատուր) was the god of hospitality. In ancient Armenian his name literally meant "a person who gives you shelter." Amanor symbolized the New Year and the harvest that came together with it, while Vanatur symbolized hospitality in Bagrevand during the festivities of Navasard.

These two gods were usually presented together since their bond was strong in the beliefs of the Armenians.

Spandaramet

Spandaramet was the god of the underworld. His underworld would often be seen as identical to the world of the dead that was described in other places around the ancient world. An Armenian term, the pits of

Spandaramet (Սանդարամետք անդնդոց), was often used when referring to hell and its demons.

Heroes

Hayk the Great

A statue of Hayk in Armenia

The gods who created the world and humans, as well as all of the great things which could be found in the human world, were both mighty and prominent. The almighty giants were the descendants of these gods, and they were considered heroes.

The giants gathered and decided to build a tower in Babylon to reach the gods, but the gods saw their act as rebellious and arrogant. During the construction of the tower, the gods grew furious and sent a tempest which destroyed the tower. In addition, the gods cursed each and every person

who was involved with the building of this tower. As a result of the curse, each person started talking in a new language, to which the others were completely oblivious. This caused massive confusion and disarray amongst the people of Babylon.

One of the giants who had taken part in the construction of the tower was Hayk, a descendant to Japhet. Hayk was a prominent and courageous leader who was also a famous archer. He was handsome, strong and muscular, with curly hair and bright eyes. Hayk was the only one of the giants who rebelled against all those who tried to dominate the rest of the giants when the mixed languages had created great confusion in Babylon. It was also at this time that one of the giants, Titanid Bel, managed to set up a tyranny by forcing all of the other giants to follow his lead. Bel had announced himself as the king and god of Babylon.

Hayk rose up against Bel and his arrogance, and he ultimately refused to call Bel a god. Eventually Hayk gathered all of his descendants and followers, and he migrated to the land of Ararad, where he settled down for the time being. After building a colony there, Hayk left these lands to his grandson Kadmos and traveled northwest with the rest of his followers until finally settling down in a valley called Hark. The indigenous people also joined Hayk's settlement.

Meanwhile, Titanid Bel had managed to subjugate all of the people spread out in Babylon to himself and his tyrannical rule. He had forced the people to make sacrifices for him and to worship him as if he was their god. Even though each and every person had submitted to Bel's rule, Hayk kept manifesting his disobedience by not worshipping Bel.

Bel, while harboring hatred against Hayk, tried to win him over to his side by sending delegations to negotiate, but the negotiations failed when Hayk refused Titanid Bel's offers and sent the delegations back to Babylon.

Angered even more, Bel gathered his armies to march on Hayk's settlements, and the ones to suffer the first blow of Titanid Bel's anger were Hayk's descendants in the land of Ararad, led by his grandson Kadmos. Luckily, Kadmos managed to flee and take the news of the attack

to his grandfather. After receiving the news, Hayk called for his son Aramaneak, grandson Kadmos, as well as the sons of his 70 daughters to assemble and battle against Titanid Bel and his armies. All of Hayk's descendants were strong men who were ready to sacrifice their lives in an instant for Hayk and their newfound homeland.

The battle against Bel's armies, which were far greater in number, was not an easy one. Hayk and his followers were forced to retreat, but Hayk realized that Bel would not leave until he got what he wanted: obedience from Hayk's followers.

Eventually, the two clashed in battle, and even though Hayk had a massive disadvantage in numbers, his followers were fighting for a right cause. This allowed them to push Bel's armies back, and once he realized that he was in a pinch, Bel tried to flee. However, Hayk had noticed Bel's cowardly intentions and had drawn his wide-arced bow and shot the triple-fletched arrow at Titanid Bel's breast armor. The arrow pierced right through Bel's back and stuck in the ground, thus ending his life. Witnessing their god's demise, Bel's soldiers fled in terror.

To celebrate his victory, Hayk built a new settlement where the battle had taken place and named it Hayq.

Juliano Zasso’s illustration depicting Hayk killing Bel

Mkrtum Hovnatanian’s “Hayk” depicts Hayk standing next to Bel’s tomb (with Hayk's arrow still in Bel's chest) and a map that shows the Lake Van region and Mount Ararat

Aram Haykazuni

Aram was one of Hayk’s descendants. He was a zealous, honest, and courageous young man who would have rather sacrificed his life for his homeland than see it ravaged by foreign invaders.

Seeing how the number of invasions had been growing, and how intruders were exploiting his countrymen and desolating the land, Aram decided to gather the brave soldiers of his family. Over 50,000 young and strong warriors who were skilled spearmen and archers answered Aram's call and gathered around him.

Near the Armenian borders, Aram and his warriors encountered a group of young Median soldiers led by Nyukar Mades, a prideful man who found joy in war. Nyukar Mades had already invaded Armenian lands on several occasions, ravaged the land and had even seized control over the people for two years.

Aram took his opponents by surprise and commenced his all-out offensive before sunrise. Nyukar Mades' armies were fully destroyed and he himself was taken hostage. Nyukar Mades was later taken to Armavir, the central city of Armenia, and was led up to the top of the tallest tower in the city, where he was pierced to the walls by having an iron spear put through his forehead. Aram did this to show the strength of the Armenians to all of those who entered the city or passed by. Later, Aram went on to conquer Nyukar Mades' lands in Media.

In Movses Khorenatsi's *History of Armenia*, the second episode involving Aram is his fight against the Assyrian Empire. King Ninus of the Assyrian Empire was harboring hatred towards Armenians, the descendants of Hayk, who had killed his ancestors Titanid Bel. He was making plans for revenge against Hayk's followers and was waiting for the right moment to execute them.

Having watched Aram and seen all of his courageous deeds and victories, Ninus pretended to be on friendly terms with the Armenian king. Ninus even gave Aram the right to wear a diadem made of pearls, which would signify that Aram was his second, an honorable title. Later, however, Barsham of Assyria, who also was of the race of giants, started his invasions of Armenia. He had an army which consisted of 40,000 armed infantry and 5,000 cavalry. Aram gathered his soldiers and warrior brothers, marched against Barsham, crushed the Assyrian armies, and chased them to the Assyrian plains. Here Aram massacred Barsham's army, and Barsham himself was killed in the fighting. According to

Khorenatsi, Barsham was one of the most beloved generals of the Assyrian people, and Barsham later made appearances in the legend of the god Vahagn.

Aram has been remembered by the Armenian people as one of the most beloved heroes. As some historians and scientists believe, the word armen, which was used to refer to Armenians, was derived from Aram's name.

After Aram's death, his throne was inherited by his fair and handsome son, Ara.

Ara the Fair and Semiramis

In Khorenatsi's *History*, the story which concludes the first cycle of Armenian heroes is that of Ara the Fair and Semiramis (or Shamiram, as seen in Armenian text). When Ara came to power, Ninus was still the King of Assyria. Ninus considered Ara worthy of the same favors he had been offering to Aram. Meanwhile, Ninus' wife, Semiramis, who was a perfidious and lustful woman, had heard of Ara's beauty for many years and was yearning to meet him. However, while Ninus was alive, she refrained from openly declaring her lust for Ara the Fair.

Thus, as soon as Ninus passed away, Semiramis did not waste a second and sent royal delegates with splendid gifts to Ara, confessing her love and asking Ara to come to Nineveh to marry her and rule over the lands which used to belong to Ninus, or to at least to satisfy her lustful wishes and return to his homeland with many gifts of splendor. When the delegates arrived in Armenia and conveyed Semiramis' will to Ara, they were met with Ara's rejections. Semiramis kept sending her delegates to Ara several more times, but every single time they returned to Semiramis with nothing.

After these series of rejections, Semiramis grew furious, so she she gathered the armies of her dead husband and marched onto Armenia. However, her desire was not to conquer Armenia or to kill Ara, but to take him hostage and make him fulfill her lascivious desires.

Semiramis and her armies arrived at the Plain of Ara, which later was named Ayrarat after the fair king. Before the battle commenced, she

commanded her generals and warriors to take Ara alive and possibly without a scratch, but Ara's armies suffered a devastating defeat and Ara himself was killed at the hands of Semiramis' warriors. After the battle was over, Semiramis ordered her corpse collectors to find Ara's body and take him to the roof of her palace.

The Armenian armies regrouped and were preparing for a new offensive to avenge his death and recover the corpse of their hero-king when Semiramis sent them news. She told them, "I have ordered my gods to lick Ara's wounds, and thus he will be restored to life." She had been harboring hopes that her sorcerers would manage to revive Ara through their magic, but alas, Ara's corpse started to decompose. Semiramis buried Ara's corpse in secret and declared that her gods had brought Ara back to life. The news of Ara's revival managed to end the war between Armenians and Babylonians.

Tork Angegh

Tork was the great-grandson of Hayk the Great. He was an unsightly, muscular, gigantic, awkward man who had a flat nose, eyes like holes, and an eerie gaze. Due to his unsightly appearances Tork was nicknamed Angegh (Անգեղ), which literally translates to ugly. The Armenian king Vagharshak appointed Tork to the position of ruler of the Western territories of Armenia. Tork's family and descendants were known as the House of Angegh.

Tork was bestowed with inhuman strength and power. He could easily break huge rocks off of the cliffs, give them the shape he wanted, and even hack and smoothen the stones with his fingers. According to the legends, Tork made smooth boards out of massive rocks and then with his fingers engraved eagles on them.

Once, Tork noticed enemy ships docked on the shores of the Pontus Sea. He started an offensive, but the ships managed to undock and flee further into the sea. Realizing that he could not possibly follow the ships at their current pace, Tork tore off gigantic rocks from nearby cliffs and started throwing them at the ships. The rocks caused a violent storm to arise, and many of the ships sank, while the others were thrown off course.

Tigran Yervanduni and Azhdahak

Tigran Yervanduni was one of the greatest of the Armenian kings; he was the wisest and definitely the most courageous one. Tigran was an ally of the Parthian king Cyrus the Great, and it was said he finally managed to banish the Greeks and the Romans from Armenia, thus bringing peace to its people.

Tigran's extraordinary and exceptional bravery helped him bring fame and respect to the Armenian nation, and free his lands and his people of foreign invaders. Last but not least, he managed to conquer many neighboring lands. Thanks to the great king, the Armenian lands started overflowing with gold, silver, jewels, and expensive silk. His armies were strong and formidable, equipped with the best of contemporary weaponry. If the legends are to be believed, when Tigran's armies gathered together, just the sight of them, with their shiny and bright armor, was enough to scare away and scatter the most fearsome of enemies.

Tigran was said to be a blond man with curly hair and gentle facial features. He was a humble, lawful man who respected the people around him and never envied those better than him or ignored those below him. He yearned to protect and spread his patronage over all of his subjects.

Azhdahak was the Median king and an ally to Tigran, but Tigran was also allied with the Parthian Empire, the enemies of Media. The thought of Tigran and the Parthians attacking Media gave no rest to Azhdahak, and he kept pondering about this possibility for a long time. He sought advice from his subjects, hoping to find a way to put an end to the Armenian-Parthian alliance.

One night, these constant worries brought a nightmare upon Azhdahak. The nightmare scared him to death and he woke up in the middle of the night, terrified of what he saw. Without waiting for the sunrise, he sent for his advisors and arranged an urgent meeting at his palace. After the advisors gathered, Azhdahak sat in front of them looking gloomy and thoughtful. He kept his eyes glued to the ground and kept sighing from the bottom of his soul. His advisors asked him what the reason of the urgent

meeting was, but Azhdahak kept quiet for hours on end. Finally, when he broke his long silence, he spoke of his dream.

In his dream, Azhdahak had found himself in a country previously unknown to him, standing in front of a tall mountain. To him it had seemed that the peak of the mountain was a freezing hell. It had felt like he was in the lands of Hayk the Great. Azhdahak had been gazing at the mountain for a long time, when suddenly a woman appeared to be sitting on the top of the mountain. She was wearing a dress the color of apricot, and a scarf the color of the sky. The woman was tall, had big and beautiful eyes, rosy cheeks, and it seemed to him that she was going through pains of labor.

Azhdahak, in complete awe, was watching the woman, and finally the woman found relief after birthing three sons. All three of them were tall and handsome men of heroic appearances. The first of them headed to the West riding a lion, the second son headed to the North riding a giraffe, and the third son, riding a gigantic and terrifying dragon, attacked Azhdahak's kingdom.

The next thing that Azhdahak had seen in his dream was himself standing on the roof of his very own palace, which had many colorful fountains and basins. The gods and goddesses of the Medes were here on the roof as well, and Azhdahak, together with his advisors and servants, was paying his respects to them by making sacrifices. It was at this moment that Azhdahak looked up and saw the man who was riding the dragon attack his gods and goddesses. Azhdahak tried to stop the attack by throwing himself in front of the young warrior. The two started a duel and a lot of blood was shed that night, so much that the color of the sun had changed into a bloody orange.

Azhdahak then added that there was no point in continuing the story of his dream, since it had ended with his demise. It was then when he woke up covered in his own cold sweat, terrified from this dream and unable to fall back asleep. To Azhdahak, it seemed like he had died a real death.

Azhdahak was convinced that this dream was a message from the gods. To him it seemed that he had seen the dream to find out the intentions of

Tigran of Armenia. Azhdahak believed that Tigran was going to attack Media together with the Parthian forces, and this thought simply terrified him. Azhdahak asked his advisors to help him find a way to deal with Tigran and the imminent danger.

Together with his advisors, Azhdahak spent the night planning and thinking of his future plan of action. After a while, Azhdahak thanked his advisors for their thoughtful and interesting proposals and announced his final decision. He told them, “My dear and loyal friends. I want to thank each and every one of you for your advice and help. I listened to all of your opinions, and now I have finally come to a decision. I am sure that our gods and goddesses will also bless this decision and we will be able to protect our country and people from the vicious king Tigran. I am convinced that the best way of being wary of your enemies, guessing their intentions and finally destroying them is through preaching love and unity. I am sure that we cannot win Tigran’s trust just by sending him treasures and countless gifts. Thus, I suggest that we try and arrange a royal marriage between me and Tigran’s beautiful sister. After establishing a stable relationship with Tigran’s family, we will not only be able to freely travel to and through Armenia, but will also get a great opportunity to bribe Tigran’s advisors and subjects. By doing so we will have the perfect setting for killing Tigran without him realizing what has been happening behind his back.”

After some deliberation, Azhdahak’s advisors agreed with their king’s proposal. Without further ado, they started preparing for the royal proposal. Finally, when all of the preparations were done, and a big procession was ready to leave for Armenia, taking many treasures and riches with it, Azhdahak chose one of his trusted subjects and gave him a letter addressed to the Armenian king Tigran. In his letter, Azhdahak had written the following: “You are a brother to me, and you know all too well that for powerful kings like us the best way of keeping peace is uniting in love to pass our wisdom and power to the generations that are to come. If we unite, no foreign authority will be able to come between us and our brotherhood. We will be able to defeat any and all enemies if we stand strong together. We have been good to each other for many long years, but I want to suggest a means for an even deeper kindredship between our

kingdoms. By doing so, the two of us will only strengthen our kingdoms from against the threats of the foreign foes. So I ask you for the hand of your sister, the beautiful and wise Tigranuhi. If you agree, I will make her the Queen of the Queens. I bid you my warmest regards and await your answer."

Azhdahak's delegates arrived to Armenia without any issues and handed the royal letter to King Tigran. Oblivious to Azhdahak's treacherous plans, Tigran agreed to the marriage proposal. He sent his sister, the fair Tigranuhi, to Media, with many royal gifts and servants. As soon as Azhdahak married Tigranuhi, he made her his first wife and the Queen of Media. While the reason behind this was Azhdahak's plan to get rid of the Armenian king, he was in awe of Tigranuhi's beauty and could not resist her charms. He even gave orders to all of his subjects to obey Tigranuhi's every order and whim.

It was not long after the marriage that Azhdahak approached his wife and tried to win her over by lying about Tigran. He told her that Tigran's wife Zaruhi had been jealous of the fact that Tigranuhi had become the queen of the Medes. Azhdahak talked of Tigran and Zaruhi plotting against him so that they could rule over the Medes and Zaruhi be the Queen of the Queens. He told her, "The rest is up to you, my dear. You can either stay loyal to your brother and bring doom upon all of us here in Media, or you can realize what is good for the both of us and try to help me with a wise piece of advice. You are my only hope for us to preserve our future."

Tigranuhi was a wise woman, and she instantly understood what her husband's treacherous plans were. She also understood that Azhdahak was also threatening her if she did not do as he wished. Being a wise woman, she managed to calm Azhdahak down with her words and pleasantries for the time being, yet meanwhile she sent messengers to her brother to inform him of the imminent danger.

After some time, Azhdahak commenced the execution of his hideous plan. He sent his delegates to Tigran, asking him to meet somewhere near the Armenian-Median border. His delegates told Tigran that the reason for the sudden meeting was Azhdahak's desire to discuss some urgent and top secret matters which could not be trusted to any paper or messenger.

The Armenian king already knew of Azhdahak's deceitful plans, and thus sent a letter revealing the truth and condemning Azhdahak of lying and treason. With the big reveal, the situation and the relations between the two countries reached the peak of their tensions.

With the situation escalating, and the enmity sparking between the two countries, King Tigran started preparing for war. He sent his messengers all over his kingdom, calling for all of his armies to gather. He then proceeded to Media with an army of excellent soldiers, all of whom were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their king and kingdom.

The war became imminent, which forced Azhdahak to gather his armies and march against Tigran of Armenia. Nevertheless, the fact that Tigran's sister Tigranuhi was still in Media stalled the beginning of the war. This tense situation lasted for over five months, but eventually Tigran managed to save his beloved sister and spirit her away from Azhdahak's grasp.

As soon as this plan succeeded, Tigran launched an all-out war against the Medes. The war lasted for a long time, since both the Armenians and the Medes were courageous people and neither one would give in or retreat. It finally came to an end when lancer Tigran came face-to-face with Azhdahak. Tigran threw his long spear at Azhdahak with enormous power, and his spear pierced Azhdahak's armor. The legend says that when Tigran removed his spear from Azhdahak's chest, the latter's lungs were still attached to the tip of the weapon.

The war thus ended with Tigran's brilliant victory. Afterwards, Tigran sent his sister Tigranuhi to a city he had built and named after himself, Tigranakert. Many servants accompanied her with incredible treasures gathered from all around the world. Tigran had ordered his sister to be the ruler of the city and its surrounding areas. Her descendants become famous royals and warriors in the generations to come.

Tigran treated Azhdahak's first wife Anuysh and his descendants with honor. Azhdahak's huge following consisted of over 10,000 men and women. Tigran resettled them on the Eastern slopes of Mount Masis. Even though they were subject to Tigran, he let them preserve some autonomous powers.

The Cycle of Artashes

Armenian King Sanatruk was the son of Avde, the sister of King Agbar of Osroene. Once during winter, when Avde, together with her newborn babe, was traveling to Armenia through the mountainous passages and roads, a snowstorm started raging. During the blizzard, the retinue of Avde got separated from one another. The babe was together with his nurse during the blizzard, and when they got separated from the rest of their group, the nurse, whose name was Sanot, kept him near her breasts to cover him from the raging storms. It was then that the gods sent a beautiful white animal, most likely a dog, to protect the newborn babe till the blizzard calmed. They spent three days hiding from the storms and the cold like this. Finally, with the weather clearing up, the people who were out there searching for the lost prince managed to find him and his nurse safe and sound. This is the reason why the babe was named Sanatruk (Սանատրուկ), in literal translation from Armenian meaning *given/gifted by Sanot*.

In later years, when Sanatruk became King of Armenia, he started reconstructing the city of Mtsbin (Մծբին), surrounding it by a double rampart. He then placed a statue of himself holding one penny in the center of the city. The penny was supposed to symbolize the fact that he had spent all of his treasures on rebuilding the city, and only this one penny was left afterwards. Sanatruk was a king regarded highly and beloved by his people. According to the legend, he was killed during a hunting trip, by a mistakenly released arrow.

After Sanatruk’s death, the country fell into a situation of despair and unrest. During these tumultuous times, a person named Yervand took the Armenian throne. The legends say that Yervand’s mother was from the royal dynasty of the Arshakuni, commonly known as the Arsacid dynasty. In the historical sources, such as Khorenatsi’s *History*, she is described as an unsightly, hideous and lewd woman, whom no man would dare to bed with. It was said that she bore two sons as a result of fornication with a bull. The sons were named Yervand and Yervaz. The legends say that Yervand had a terrifying gaze, which could split stone into two.

As years passed, Yervand turned into a brave and strong man. He started his service at Sanatruk's court. Yervand stood out with his dedication and hard work. Thanks to his efforts, Yervand became one of the most well-respected and influential lords at Sanatruk's court. After Sanatruk passed, all of the lords at the court united and chose Yervand to be their next king. However, the traditional coronation by the Bagratuni lords, the Coronants of the Kings (Թագադիր Ասպետ), did not take place (in Ancient Armenia, the rule of a king without the official coronation by the Bagratuni lords was considered to be illegal and illegitimate).

After succeeding the throne of Sanatruk and becoming the king of Armenia, the thing that worried Yervand the most was the existence of Sanatruk's children. He was terrified of the thought that one day Sanatruk's children might overthrow him and take the throne which rightfully belonged to them. Thus, he ordered his minions to massacre Sanatruk's children and remaining family. Only Sanatruk's youngest son, a newborn babe named Artashes was saved from the ruthless massacre. His nurse had managed to flee and go into hiding, from where she sent messages to the Coronant of the Kings, Smbat Bagratuni (Սմբատ Բագրատունի).

As soon as Smbat learnt of Sanatruk's death, and the massacre that had followed, he sent his daughter to the stronghold of Bayberd, which was protected by many courageous and brave men. Afterwards, he and his wife, together with the rest of their followers, went on a journey to find the babe Artashes.

Yervand learnt of Smbat's intentions, and immediately sent out men to find and seize him. Meanwhile, Smbat managed to locate and find the babe prince. Being cautious not to be found and killed by Yervand's minions, Smbat gave up his royal attire and following, and started walking through the mountainous roads together with the babe. They spent their night in the tents of shepherds who shared their meals with Smbat and Artashes, until they reached the border with Persia and managed to pass it. Smbat was a famous general, well-known to the Persians and highly respected too, thus he headed straight to the palace of the Persian King Darius. Smbat and the babe were welcomed in the Persian court with the

highest honors: Smbat was treated the same as any other high-ranking lord in the Persian court, while the young boy was being brought up together with the children of the Persian king.

The fact that Artashes' had managed to flee and live on was not giving any peace of mind to Yervand. Artashes was growing up in Persian court under the supervision of the Coronant Smbat and the Persian king. Yervand spent his waking hours in terror, afraid of what was to come; he could not sleep in peace, and when he did manage to fall asleep, he would have nightmares and night terrors. Thus, Yervand was set on trying to find ways of getting rid of the danger that Artashes imposed.

Yervand sent many delegates to the Persian court with letters and many excellent gifts to King Darius. Some of his letters said the following:

"Blood of my blood, my friend and ally, why are you protecting the Median lad Artashes? He is a threat to my kingdom and my rule, and you are giving him excellent upbringing. Why are you heeding to the words of treacherous Smbat? Why do you believe that Artashes is Sanatruk's son and heir? He is simply a son of the Median shepherds, and by no means Sanatruk's son and your relative. Smbat is lying to you, while presenting a Median boy, trying to create enmity between the two of us and bring ruin to my rule."

Yervand also sent messengers to Smbat telling him that the nurse has lied to him and presented a Median boy as Sanatruk's son. Yervand would also add that all of Smbat's efforts were futile, since the boy had no real claim to the throne.

Unfortunately for Yervand, both Darius and Smbat gave him very rough answers, disregarding his pleas. This angered Yervand, and eventually he ordered his soldiers to attack the stronghold of Bayberd. They killed all of the brave warriors who were protecting the castle and took Smbat's daughters hostage.

As time passed, the babe Artashes grew into a handsome and brave young man. His guardian Smbat was beloved by the Persian court and the king: being an excellent general he had helped the Persians in their battles against their enemies. The Persian lords regarded Smbat very highly,

which led them to approach their king and ask him to reward Smbat for all of the brave and loyal actions he had taken for the sake of their kingdom. To this Darius agreed with great pleasure, and he commanded his subjects to find out what it was that the Armenian lord yearned for the most. The lords told their king that the only thing that Smbat wished for was to restore Artashes, Sanatruk's only remaining heir, back on the Armenian throne, which lawfully and rightfully belonged to the young lad.

King Darius agreed to help Smbat and Artashes in their endeavor of reclaiming the throne without any hesitation. He gave the command of his armies which patrolled Atropatene to Smbat and ordered him to restore Artashes on the Armenian throne.

As soon as Yervand got the news of the imminent attack, he started calling his armies from all over the country to gather and prepare for war. Many lords gathered in Yervandashat, the capital which Yervand had built and named after himself. Even Argam of House Murats joined Yervand. Yervand honored his guests and presented them with many precious gifts. He also ordered to have the soldiers well fed, given a bed and paid.

In the meantime, Smbat, together with young Artashes, marched towards Armenia. When they finally reached the borders of Utik, the Armenian lords whom Yervand had sent to patrol the area joined Smbat and Artashes and swore them their loyalty. This caused disorder between the Armenian lords, especially since the promised help from Rome was not arriving. Many were contemplating the thoughts of leaving Yervand's side and joining with their rightful and lawful king. With this change in the attitude of the lords, Yervand was giving more and more gifts and treasures to each of them, promising them many titles. Yet these actions only made the lords grow more and more hateful of Yervand. They realized and understood that these actions were not a token of Yervand's generosity but simply of his fear and terror. The lords stopped respecting Yervand, and many simply started to harbor hatred towards him.

Smbat and young Artashes managed to reach the Sea of Gegham (Գեղամա ծով) and moved in the direction of Yervandashat to meet Yervand and his armies. Smbat did not give much thought to the large size of Yervand's armies. However, the only thing that made him be more

careful than the usual, was the presence of Argam of the House Murats, since the latter not only was a leader to excellent troops, but was also a man of great strength, courage and honor.

As the two sides started making preparations for a battle at the banks of river Akhurian (Ախուրյան գետ), Artashes sent several messengers and delegates to the lord of House Murats. Artashes was trying to convince Argam to leave Yervand's side and join forces together with him, the rightful heir to Armenia's throne. He also promised Argam to give him everything that Yervand had promised and even more.

As soon as Artashes' banners were visible to Yervand's armies, Lord Argam of House Murats withdrew his infantry and stood aside from the incoming battle. It was at this moment that Smbat ordered his soldiers to commence the attack on Yervand's armies. The rest of the Armenian lords, of whom the left and right flanks of Yervand's armies consisted, made use of the moment and joined Artashes.

Yervand suffered a devastating defeat. The noble and brave soldiers of Tavros, who had promised their aid to Yervand, seeing the latter's situation threw themselves into the battle. It was Gisak, the son of Artashes' wet nurse, who tried to stop the attack of mighty soldiers of Tavros. Unfortunately, even though he managed to stop their offensive, he suffered a fatal blow and fell on the battlefield as a hero.

The rest of Yervand's army fled in despair and terror. Yervand also fled from the battlefield. He changed horses at every tavern, trying to reach the city he had built and find some help there. Yet Smbat was pursuing Yervand without a minute's rest.

Meanwhile, Artashes moved to Yervand's tents, and spent the first night after his victory there. When he rose in the morning, he gave the order to bury all of the fallen soldiers from both his and Yervand's side. The place where the battle had taken place was later named Yervandavan (Երվանդավան), *The place where from Yervand was gotten rid of*.

After the burials were over, together with his armies, Artashes marched upon Yervandashat. As soon as he got there, Artashes ordered his soldiers to chant *Mar amat* (Մար ամատ), which in old Armenian meant 'The

Median boy has come.’ By this, Artashes wanted to remind Yervand of the offences he had to live with, he wanted to remind Yervand of the fact that the latter tried to convince the Persian King, and even Smbat, that Artashes was just a Median boy (Yervand’s city was later renamed to *Maramet* (Մարամետ), most likely by Artashes’ will, simply to have Yervand’s name erased).

By this time, Smbat and his small group of faithful soldiers had already reached Yervandashat and surrounded the gate, Yervand’s only way of escape. When Artashes and all of his armies reached Yervandashat, the offense on the city began. Yet the fight did not last for very long. Yervand’s soldiers opened the gates from the inside of the fortress and let Artashes’ armies in. One of Artashes’ soldiers found Yervand, hit him on the head with an axe and instantly killed him.

Despite all that he had to suffer because of Yervand, Artashes ordered his formal burial to take place. He knew that Yervand was from the Arshakuni dynasty, and thus did not take the honor of a formal burial away from him. Artashes even built a statue on Yervand’s tomb.

Soon after Yervand’s death, Smbat entered the royal treasury and found late King Sanatruk’s crown. He took the crown, put it on Artashes’ head, and as the Coronant Knight crowned him to be the king to all of Armenia and Armenians.

After his coronation, the young King Artashes rewarded all of those who had helped him regain his father’s throne. He gave many treasures to the Persian and Median soldiers and sent them home with honors.

Artashes also kept his promises to Lord Argam from House Murats: Argam was announced to be second to the king; he was given a headdress made of blue jewels, the right to wear round earrings and a red shoe on one foot, and to use golden tableware while dining and drinking wine.

The Coronant Knight Smbat was given the same rewards as Lord Argam, except for the right of wearing the round earrings and the red shoe. Smbat was already the commander of the Western squads of the Armenian army. After the victory against Yervand, Artashes made Smbat the commander in

chief of all of the Armenian army, as well as the headmaster of the royal court.

After some time Artashes went to the place where the rivers Yeraskh and Metsamor met and united into one. He liked the hill that stood there quite a lot and decided to build a city here. The city was called Artashat after Artashes.

Artashes made the new city into the capital of Armenia and moved his royal court here. By Artashes' orders, the city was turned into the central place of worship in Armenia.

Meanwhile, the Alans had united and were conquering all of the Caucasian lands. Eventually their conquest turned to Armenia and they started a massive offensive, with an army of countless soldiers. To stop their conquest and protect his kingdom, Artashes gathered his armies from all over Armenia and prepared for war. Artashes' armies were mighty and strong, and their attacks made the Alans retreat. The Alans, on their way of retreat, passed the river Kur and made camp on the northern banks of the river. Since Artashes was pursuing them, he also made camp on the southern banks of Kur river. At this point the river was the only thing that stopped the enemy armies from attacking each other.

During the previous attacks, the Alan prince had been taken hostage by the Armenian army. Since the prince was the only son and male heir to the Alan throne, the Alan king sent many delegates to Artashes begging for his son's life. He promised to do anything that Artashes asked for, if only the latter would spare his son's life and let him free. The Alan king even promised to never step into the Armenian lands, and to leave as soon as his son was freed. Nonetheless, Artashes refused to let the Alan prince free.

The sister of the hostage prince, the beautiful Alan princess Satenik, was also at their father's camp. As soon as she heard of Artashes' refusal to let her brother free, she went and stood at the bank of the river Kur and called to Artashes, telling him the following: "I say to you valiant Artashēs, who have conquered the brave nation of the Alans. Come, consent to the request of the beautiful-eyed Alan princess to give up the youth. For it is not right for heroes to take the lives of the progeny of other heroes for the

sake of vengeance, or by subjecting them to keep them in the rank of slaves and establish eternal enmity between two brave nations."[4]

Artashes carefully listened to the wise words of the Alan princess. Eventually curiosity took the better of him, and the proud king went to the banks of the river to see whom these words belonged to. As soon as Artashes met the fair maiden, he could not resist the desire to wed her. Artashes immediately sent for his trusted friend and advisor Smbat and told him of the love and passion that had taken him over. Artashes also announced that by marrying the fair Alan maiden, he would be tying the knot with the Alan people and would let the young Alan prince free.

Smbat liked Artashes' offer very much, and without further delay sent his delegates to the camp of the Alan king, asking for his daughter's hand. After getting the marriage proposal, the Alan king replied, "And whence will the brave Artashēs give thousand thousands and a myriad myriads in return for the noble born princess of the Alans?"[5]

The arrogant message from the Alan king made Artashes furious, and he decided to take the course of actions into his own hands:

> "Noble King Artashēs mounted a beautiful black horse,
>
> and taking a lasso of red leather with golden rings
>
> and crossing the river like a swift-winged eagle
>
> and throwing the lasso of red leather with golden rings
>
> he cast it around the waist of the Alan princess,
>
> greatly paining the tender maiden's waist,
>
> and quickly brought her to his camp."[6]

After forcefully kidnapping Satenik from the Alan camp, Artashes brought her to his capital city, Artashat. Here he prepared for a royal wedding, which according to the Armenian historians was one to remember. Following the royal tradition, when the groom-king

entered the hall, golden coins were being thrown above his head, and when his bride-queen entered the hall, pearls were being thrown above her head. The scene has been portrayed in the following words:

> “A shower of gold rained down at the marriage of Artashēs;
>
> it rained pearls at the wedding of Sat‘inik.”[7]

Satenik became Artashes’ first wife and the queen of Armenia. She bore him many sons, including the future king Artavazd.

Many years passed, and during one of his trips to Persia, Artashes fell ill. Many tried to cure him, but the sickness was taking its toll on the already old Artashes. On his deathbed, the only thing Artashes wished for was seeing his homeland for one last time, to be there on the morning of the New Year and take part in the royal hunt and celebrations.

During Artashes’ burial, many people, including his wives, concubines, as well as his loyal servants, willingly decided to cast away their lives and join their king in the underworld. Artashes’ corpse was treated with utmost honor. Artashes was put in a golden coffin, dressed in clothes made of golden silk, his head crowned with a golden crown, and in his hands a golden sword.

During the burial, Artashes’ coffin was surrounded by his children and relatives, followed by the men in arms, generals and lords and finally the infantry. Each and everyone in this massive procession was armed from head to toe, as if heading to a furious battle. The men blowing the horns were walking at the beginning of the procession, and at the end of it were women who wore black and mourned, cried and wept for their king’s demise. And like this the whole Armenian nation was burying the most beloved king to ever be known.

After Artashes’ death, his son Artavazd was crowned to be the king of Armenia. Except for his younger brother Tiran, he banished every other sibling he had from the royal court. He kept Tiran next to him as his heir, since Artavazd himself did not have any sons. Yet Artavazd was cursed by his father Artashes.

Before the latter's death, many were willingly giving up their lives to be able to serve their king loyally even in death. Seeing this Artavazd grew anxious and angry and talked to his father like this: "Since you went and took all the land with you, to what purpose shall I reign over these ruins?"[8]

Therefore, Artashes cursed him in these words:

> "If you go hunting up on Noble Masis, the spirits
>
> will seize you and take you up to Noble Masis;
>
> there you will remain and no more see the light."[9]

It did not take long for the father's curse to come true. Once, when Artavazd went hunting near the slopes of Mount Masis, the demons caught him and took him to one of the caves of Masis, where they shackled him.

According to the legend, which is told in Armenia to this day, Artavazd's loyal dogs kept chewing and gnawing at his shackles to free their lord. They almost freed him, and Artavazd was ready to come out from his imprisonment and end the world. But at the sound of the hammering of blacksmiths, his bonds were strengthened. Thus, even in our times, the blacksmiths of Armenia, following the fable, strike the anvil three or four times at the beginning of every week. This is done so that Artavazd's iron chains may be strengthened and so that he cannot leave his eternal prison.

Conclusion

Armenian myths and legends are as old as the Armenian people. These stories have survived for several millennia and have become a part of Armenian life through celebrations, ceremonies, and rites, even after Armenia became a Christian land. Thanks to that fact, the myths and legends continued to be passed down from generation to generation and reached modern day Armenia through engravings, pictograms, written sources, national dances and songs.

These myths and legends, while not literally true, no doubt had historical bases, and they help demonstrate how the Armenian people created and lived in their homeland, the Armenian Highlands. These creations of imagination and mind are not only of great value to Armenians, but also carry a massive significance in the development of European culture and civilization as a whole.

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